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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Letter dated 8 January 2001 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the address of the President of Ukraine, H.E. Mr. Leonid Kuchma, delivered on 15 December 2000 on the occasion of the Chornobyl nuclear power plant closure (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 20 (b).

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Annex to the letter dated 8 January 2001 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Address of the President of Ukraine, H.E. Mr. Leonid Kuchma, on the occasion of the Chornobyl nuclear power station closure, delivered on 15 December 2000

I address the Ukrainian people, heads of State, Governments and Parliaments of foreign countries and the whole world community in connection with the event that has a milestone significance for mankind, for everyone who lives and will live on our Earth. Today, on 15 December 2000, 2000 years after the birth of Christ, I issued an order to shut down the third power unit, which is the last of those functioning at the Chornobyl nuclear power station. This means the closure of the facility that made history as a massive and horrible catastrophe.

Fifteen years have passed since the day when a fire at the wrecked nuclear reactor initiated a new phase of civilization, the "post-Chornobyl" era. Since 26 April 1986, the name of this small town in Polissya has lost its original, geographical meaning and obtained a global political and ecological meaning. It has joined the symbolic list of tremendous and devastating cataclysms that entered history as the distinctive marks of their epochs, such as Pompeii, Hernic and Hiroshima. The words "Chornobyl nuclear power station" personify a new phenomenon — nuclear energy out of control, the practical materialization of threatening warnings, which nature has sent many times to people to try and prevent their frivolous, thoughtless and felonious treatment of themselves.

For Ukraine, the act of the decommissioning of the Chornobyl nuclear power station is, without exaggeration, from many points of view an event of epochal importance. In so doing, we are first paying a tribute to the memory of those who died of the diseases caused by this catastrophe while eliminating the consequences of the disaster. Second, we confirm once more that we are fully committed to our obligations to the world. Third, we are finally parting with a totalitarian legacy and its tyranny, indifference and cruelty to human beings, society and nature. And fourth, we reiterate our intention to build our future responsibly, guided by our European inclinations as well as concern for the future generations of the Ukrainian people and the whole humanity.

This decision was conceived by the harrowing experience of the previous 15 years. Ukraine has to pay the bills it did not sign and expiate the sins it did not commit. Its citizens were the first to step into the fire and into the invisible but murderous field of radiation with the aim of protecting the whole planet from the disastrous fire at the cost of their own lives. And by their experience they paid the highest price to give mankind the key to solving such unprecedented problems.

What is Chornobyl for Ukraine? It is nearly 3.5 billion people affected by the catastrophe and its consequences. It is almost 10 per cent of the territory affected by direct radiation. It is 160,000 people from 170 localities who had to abandon their homes and move to other places. By quoting these sad statistics, we do not forget about other countries and peoples, on whose lives the most technological catastrophe of the twentieth century has also left its ominous mark.

This is the fate and history that our State has to bear — its Chornobyl Cross — mostly by itself, alone with its own difficulties and trials. The total economic expenses connected with the catastrophe at the Chornobyl station have already reached $130 billion. We have been compelled in addition to divert enormous material and financial resources on the protection of the affected population and rehabilitation of natural environment. Such expenses have on occasion consumed 12 per cent of the state budget, which considerably exceeds budget assignments for science and culture.

I would like all of you to pay attention to this. I would like the following fact to be considered as well. Ukraine is closing its Chornobyl nuclear power plant in conditions when its economy, with an extremely deformed structure and vast power consumption, has just started to recover after a long crisis in difficult fuel and energy conditions and during winter. To these factors the extremely adverse weather conditions must also be added, which in extensive territories have become a kind of natural disaster. Thus, to lose 5 per cent of generating capacities at a minimum means being ready not only for significant additional losses but also for considerable risk. Not to mention that after its closure, the Chornobyl nuclear power plant has been transformed from a manufacturer of electric power to its consumer.

Yet Ukraine is making this step consciously and voluntarily, following the highest priority interests of our people and international community. We realize that Chornobyl is a threat to the entire world, and consequently we are ready to sacrifice a part of the national interests for the sake of global safety. The implementation of the decision on the closure of Chornobyl that was declared in the early 1990s and confirmed five years ago in the Ottawa memorandum is the second unprecedented goodwill act realized by the Ukrainian State. The first was the renunciation of one third of the capacity of its nuclear arsenal. I hope the world appreciates the importance and humanity of such actions, and is also assured of our commitment to addressing nuclear security problems from the sphere of declarations to the level of real practical issues.

I emphasize this with regard to another, probably the most dreadful and tragic Chornobyl consequence. It is the constant fear of the people for their lives and health, for the fate of their children and grandchildren, for the ecology of the lands and forests, seas and rivers, and subterranean waters. The fear that exists regardless of where they live — near the wrecked reactor and contaminated radioactive zone or thousands of kilometres away. An area that is desolated, silent and hostile to all life, located several dozens of kilometres away from the Ukrainian capital, a reality not created by the imagination or a computer projection, which demonstrates what could happen to the planet if people lack reason and caution in their use of the achievements of science and technology.

The Chornobyl fire fighters and liquidators shielded mankind from such a perspective — as their predecessors from Kyiv Rus safeguarded Europe at the dawn of the Renaissance from alien incursions. Today's act, having eliminated the delayed-action nuclear mine in the heart of Europe, is the beginning of relief from the Chornobyl syndrome in Ukraine as well as at the global level. The sword of Damocles that has all those years been hanging above us is passing into non-existence.

At the same time, this dreadful page of modern history cannot be considered to be completely behind us. The fact of the Chornobyl collisions remain, it is only that

they have been transformed into a new dimension. At the start of the twenty-first century and the third millennium, there is a new era awaiting us, a new one in the post-Chornobyl sense as well. Yet, it raises more questions than gives answers to them.

Before us is the long and complicated process of taking the power station out of operation and its transformation into an ecologically secure system above the damaged fourth energy unit. Before us is also the challenge of ensuring the social security of the station's workers, who are being dismissed, and of the members of their families, and of determining and planning the future of Slavutych city, where they all live. Not one of these people, not one family, should be abandoned.

This will entail great expense, which Ukraine at the moment does not have at its disposal. We, as the State that has suffered the most from the Chornobyl catastrophe and its consequences, have the right to rely on the support of the international community. International assistance programmes are of vital importance, as well as human compassion and understanding of the problems we face.

First, the decision to close Chornobyl station has been adopted and implemented under the guarantees of such assistance, above all on the part of the Group of Seven member States. Second, there is a need that is aggravated with each passing day for mankind to unify all efforts to ensure a safe existence in harmony with nature and prevent technological catastrophes on a global or regional scale, and the proliferation of nuclear technologies.

Chornobyl is the most obvious but not the only evidence of that need. The consequences of accidents at civil and military nuclear facilities, chemical and other enterprises do not recognize any state borders. The danger emanating from them is common for all of us, as our living environment is also common. Let us remember that the globalization and other post-industrial realities make the present world still more closely interconnected. Our world does not end at the threshold of our houses and the boundaries of our States. According to one physicist, we have the only copy of the universe, which cannot be experimented with.

Let us remember, after the pattern of great minds, that wisdom is the daughter of experience. And experience testifies that the content and consequences of technological disasters rise above scientific and political and other differences. They demand the employment of all channels of international cooperation, so that nowhere, never and under no circumstances should a man-made disaster occur on our planet. And that, to my mind, is the main lesson of Chornobyl. The lesson is sad, painful and tragic. Nevertheless, we must learn it.

Today, I would like to reiterate the idea discussed during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, in 1997, the idea of establishing an ecological security council of the United Nations, international ecological court and international ecological bank. I believe the time has come to put this proposal on a practical footing. That would enable us to act together, in a concerted and coordinated manner, to concentrate the costs and resources to assist countries which are not able to cope on their own with the consequences of natural and technological disasters. Ukraine supports the signing of a convention on the creation of an international mechanism of ecological monitoring and control, and the

implementation of a range of other measures which would guarantee healthy and clean living conditions for all people all over the world.

For our part, we are ready to share freely and generously with the international community our unique although very bitter experience gained over the years of coping with the consequences of the Chornobyl catastrophe. We propose that the nuclear power plant, which is being shut down, and the territory adjacent to it be used as a test ground for an international scientific research centre to work on the technologies of nuclear safety improvement, the alleviation and elimination of the consequences of nuclear catastrophes, and environmental rehabilitation.

In shutting down the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, we are renouncing our own needs. We do not seek applause but constructive attention and cooperation. We do not ask for charity but for equality, respect and understanding. We are convinced that the solidarity of nations and States and the humanism of contemporary civilization will not leave Ukraine without assistance in this matter. We are grateful in advance to all who will render it.

Mankind faces the future in reflecting on the past. It is the law of the history. The things that have happened cannot be undone, but nothing should be forgotten. Then may the word "Chornobyl" become an instant and severe reminder for the responsibility in the name of coming generations, for all things created by wisdom and done by human hands. Let 15 December 2000 mark for the world a clear acceptance of this responsibility. In the words of the Holy Writ that have come to us from the depths of the ages: "A wise person knows his own way".

In conclusion, I wish to express my confidence and hope that States, peoples and all mankind will have the wisdom, will and responsibility to follow a reasonable and intelligent path free of such ominous landmarks as Chornobyl. May this be so always.